

VZCZCXRO1565
RR RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH
DE RUEHVN #0297 1440723
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 230723Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2027
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0194

UNCLAS VIENTIANE 000297

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS (BESTIC, COPE)

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [LA](#)
SUBJECT: BURMA DONORS CONFERENCE: LAO FOREIGN MINISTER TO
ATTEND

REF: A. SECSTATE 55244

[1](#)B. SECSTATE 53985
[1](#)C. VIENTIANE 0272

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Senior Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) officials view the Burmese government as having changed its attitude toward outside assistance as a result of the recent ASEAN meeting in Singapore. They expressed high hopes the May 25 Pledging Meeting in Rangoon will be effective in helping establish a process to help Burma cope with the massive humanitarian needs faced by the Burmese people. The Lao delegation to the Rangoon meeting will be led by Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Thongloun Sisoulith. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Poloff met with MFA Asia, Pacific, and Africa Department Deputy Director General Viroth Sundara May 22 to deliver ref B demarche and provided ref A additional points to him on May 23. DDG Viroth had accompanied Lao Vice Foreign Minister Bounkeut Sangsomsack on his visit to Rangoon May 7 (ref C). Viroth called the upcoming meeting a good opportunity for both ASEAN and the UN to find ways to help the Burmese government distribute international assistance -- too much of which is still stuck at the Rangoon Airport, not reaching the affected people. According to Viroth, the Burmese only had 4-5 helicopters of their own, and there is no way for trucks to reach people especially in the delta region. And the needs are great: when he toured Rangoon earlier this month, he saw 20-30 people crowding into a single small tent. In response to ref B points on reconstruction, Viroth noted that the discussion of when to begin reconstruction had already begun at the May 19 ASEAN meeting in Singapore. Viroth commented that the Singapore meeting had made good progress with the Burmese Foreign Minister who agreed that assistance teams from any ASEAN member could enter Burma to help -- earlier the Burmese had only accepted Thai and Lao medical teams. When reconstruction does begin, he added, Burma will need a great deal of construction equipment.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Poloff subsequently met with MFA ASEAN Department DDG Phongsavanh Sisoulath and also subsequently provided the ref A supplemental points. According to Phongsavanh, the May 19 Singapore meeting agreed to think of support for the emergency phase of assistance to Burma as lasting three months -- paralleling the Indonesian experience from the 2004 tsunami. After three months, the focus could turn to the reconstruction phase. He confirmed Deputy PM/FM Thongloun, now in Japan, will be back in time to attend the May 25 gathering. Laos has already sent five flights of aid to Burma and has deployed a 24-member medical team. Phongsavanh noted that the medical team, which had gone to Burma before the May 19 ASEAN meeting, only received permission to stay two weeks -- "too short a time." Now that ASEAN has pressed Burma to be more open to assistance, Phongsavanh expects

things will change, and the next Lao medical team -- probably also in the 20-24 member range -- would be allowed to stay longer. He said many doctors had already volunteered to participate on the next team.

14. (SBU) Phongsavanh pointed out that Burma's response immediately after the cyclone was to only accept assistance from its immediate neighbors -- including Laos. At the May 19 ASEAN meeting in Singapore, the ASEAN "non-neighbors," including Indonesia, pressed for more opening. Asked about the ASEAN "mechanism" set up in Singapore, Phongsavanh said that a mechanism within Burma already existed; the new element added in Singapore was for ASEAN to act as the "external mechanism" to coordinate international assistance for Burma. He expressed optimism that the task force led by ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Phitsuwan to undertake a survey and assessment of Burma's needs will "make a good contribution." Phongsavanh accepted that the capacity of the Burmese regime is "not as strong as it should be" but said allowing ASEAN to act on behalf of Burma (in coordinating assistance) would help open the country more. Another Lao Vice FM, Phongsavath Boupha, went to Burma on May 21 to examine the situation.

15. (SBU) In the May 22 discussion, Phongsavanh called the May 25 Rangoon meeting a "great opportunity" for the United States to join forty other countries. He said it would be important for the United States to send a senior-level delegation and pledge to play a major role.
HUSO